

SIGHT AND SOUND

SUMMER 1942

VOL II NO 41

ARTICLES: THE CHILD'S APPROACH
FILM AND REALITY
WHITHER THE SHORT?
NEWS FROM NEW YORK
WHAT HISTORIANS WANT

CONTRIBUTORS: Andrew Buchanan
Dr. Rachel Reid
Herman Weinberg
J. E. Sewell
Forsyth Hardy

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Forsyth Hardy Reviews Film and Reality

IT WOULD be odd if *Film and Reality* were not warmly welcomed by all who tend to take their cinema a little seriously. Here is a production which surveys the use of realist material in the cinema up till the beginning of the second world war, a work which, however one may disagree with its conclusions, provides with its excerpts from fifty-eight films a unique opportunity of examining the direction and achievement of a specialised branch of film-making. In rather less than two hours it enables one to trace, with actual examples from the most notable films, the development of realist film-making over the past forty years.

Cavalcanti and those who have worked with him to make this film for the British Film Institute deserve sincere thanks for a worth-while achievement. This must be said, and at once.

One other general impression. *Film and Reality* does clearly establish the identity of the realist cinema and demonstrate its enduring quality. Given imagination in the original work of interpretation, the realist films of twenty or thirty years ago are as vivid and compelling to-day as they were then. The same claim could hardly be made for the fictional film. No *studio* film of 1922, I am certain, would leave the impression of vigour and freshness

which the selected excerpt from Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, made in that year, does to-day. The extracts build up to something which fires the imagination and stimulates an appreciation both of what the realist film has done and of what it might do. These were clearly Cavalcanti's major aims and success in them is success for the film.

Notable Omissions

The selection of material could not have been easy. The past forty years had seen a great mass of realist work done in the cinema. And, an initial selection made, there was always the problem of choosing an extract which would suggest the character of the individual film. Cavalcanti has included most of what have come to be regarded as the key films of the realist cinema. The only obvious exceptions are Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera*, Dovjenko's *Earth*, Elton's analytical films on scientific subjects, and the latter-day British sociological films of which *The Londoners* and *To-Day We Live* may be mentioned. But, these apart, the film's range is extraordinarily comprehensive; and, in almost all cases, the chosen passage from the film reveals its quality and individuality and suggests the contribution it made to the movement. Exceptions, I think, are the *North Sea* sequence, presented as an experiment in sound, its distinguishing humanist approach curiously ignored; Rotha's *Contact* which seems somewhat arid and aimless in comparison with what might have been taken from the director's *Shipyard*; and the sequence from *The Plow that Broke the Plains* which inadequately represents the scope and sweep of the film.

Film and Reality is in five sections which vary somewhat in effectiveness and interest. A prologue which recalls the achievements of Dr. Marey (c. 1887) and the Lumière Brothers in reproducing movement from the real

world on the screen is followed by the First Section describing the recognition of the cinematograph as a new source of dramatic entertainment. It shows how contact with reality, retained in *The Life of Charles Peace* and *The Great Train Robbery*, began to be lost in such theatrical films as *The Assassination of the Duke of Guise*. This point is made but, if space had permitted, would have gained in effect from fuller illustration.

The Second Section makes the point that "contact with reality, lost in film drama, was maintained in news reels and interest films". A group of early news reels of incidental historical interest is followed by a sequence showing the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia in 1934 and it is seen that thirty years have made little difference to the straightforward record of the news reel camera. A similar suggestion is made regarding the interest film which is illustrated, among other film extracts, by *Infant Welfare in the Bird World* (1920) and *The Tough 'Un* (1938). The latter film reflects the technical and mechanical advances made in eighteen years, but in other respects there is little change.

This section closes with extracts from Herbert Ponting's memorable film of Scott's last expedition and from *The Battle of the Somme*—this, like the other, a full-length interest film which achieved wide success in the cinemas.

The Greatness of Flaherty

The Third Section is devoted to the rich and strange, what Cavalcanti calls "The Romantic Documentary of Far-off Lands". It is, inevitably, dominated by Flaherty and the excerpts from *Nanook* and *Moana* and, to a lesser extent from *Man of Aran*, give the production its most impressive moments. The fine qualities of lucid observation and imaginative interpretation in Flaherty's work come clearly through in the sequences of the

Eskimos in their storm-swept igloo and the tattooing of the Samoan youth in *Moana*, The work of Shoedsack and Cooper is, very properly, represented in this section and the sequence from *Grass*, showing a whole village with its herds crossing a river in search of new grazing, recalls a film which belongs memorably to the romantic tradition in documentary. Léon Poirier's *Eve Africaine* and *Voyage au Congo* by Marc Allegret and André Gide are comparatively unfamiliar in this country, and their inclusion helps to maintain the broad international character of the film. To judge from the commentary, Cavalcanti was hesitant about including Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon*; but, the survey would have been incomplete without this finely sympathetic interpretation of a way of life.

Sociology in Film

The Fourth Section, dealing with the sociological development of the realist film, is the heart of the whole opus.

Given the space limit, all the most notable films are here: *Rien que les Heures*; *Berlin*; *The General Line*; *Turk-Sib*; and *Drifters*. These were the productions which laid the foundations of the realist as distinct from the romantic tradition in documentary, and, as the excerpts follow one another and are succeeded by passages from *Industrial Britain*, *Housing Problems* and *Night Mail*, one can sense the sure and steady development of the film with a sociological purpose. Cavalcanti mentions the experiments in sound in *Housing Problems*; *Night Mail* and *North Sea*; and while these were important I feel that to emphasise this aesthetic aspect is to underestimate the achievement of these films in developing a human approach in place of the impersonal style of earlier British documentaries. This is particularly true of *North Sea*, a film which has had a pro-

nounced influence on subsequent production (cf. *Squadron 992*; *Men of the Lightship*, and *Target for Tonight*). It is puzzling that Cavalcanti, so closely associated with these films, should not have thought this humanist trend worth mentioning.

French and Dutch Schools

Other extracts in this sequence are, I think, deliberately chosen to remind us that documentary is not practised solely by bright young film-makers in Britain. A French group consists of work by Jean Benoit-Levy, Robert Alexandre, Jean Vigo (*Taris*), and Jean Lods (*Le Mile*), and the lively and imaginative quality of the two latter extracts show that the French directors had a special and valuable contribution to make to documentary. Joris Ivens is impressively represented by *Zuyderzee* and *The Spanish Earth*, the latter an indication of how far he travelled between 1930 and 1937 from the preoccupation with mechanical forms seen in such films as *The Bridge* and *Philips-Radio*. Lastly, the excerpt from *The March of Time*, is historically interesting and *The Plow that Broke the Plains* hints at the stimulation, late in the day, of interest in the realist film in the United States.

If Section Four is the most direct and compelling in the film, Section Five, in which Cavalcanti returns to consideration of realism in the story film, is the most complicated. It opens impressively with a passage from Maurice Stiller's *The Old Manor*—a well-deserved gesture to the Swedish cinema which even in modern times has not lost its naturalist tradition. The river-crossing sequence from *The Covered Wagon* emphasises how successful many American films are in blending a personal story with a natural background. The argument of this sequence that the theatrical film had undergone no fundamental change in the past forty years is hardly supported

by the fantastically contrasted treatments of the Potemkin mutiny by Ferdinand Zecca in 1907 and by Eisenstein in 1925, though it is aided by the matching of a Meliès 1900 version of the Dreyfus court investigation with an almost identical scene in William Dieterle's *The Life of Emile Zola* and by setting a ridiculously stagey passage from *Love from a Stranger* against a sequence from *The Lady of the Camellias*, with Sarah Bernhardt. One is not altogether persuaded by the evidence of this section to accept the film's conclusion that "the best work in the cinema has been done by those who remembered what the first inventors never doubted, that the essence of cinematography lies in its power to represent reality."

The film ends with passages from

Kameradschaft; *La Grande Illusion* and *Farewell Again*. This gives it a rousing and topical climax. Speaking personally, however, I would have preferred to see a conclusion which took into account the growing tendency in the British and French cinemas to make films of stories close to real life. I am thinking particularly of such films as *The Edge of the World*; *Bank Holiday* and *La Femme du Boulanger*. This would have given this section a legitimate growing point.

These criticisms, however, do not affect my final estimation of it as an illuminating and arresting work. I hope the Film Institute will make further films with allied aims. If they are all as successful as Cavalcanti's they will have done a fine job of work.

The Child's Approach

by

John Gittins, H.M.I.

SMALL BOYS who come before juvenile courts often tell the magistrates that "the pictures" were the cause of all the trouble. We are grateful for the tip, but before accepting it we should do well to look carefully at the tipster. These children know their magistrates; their favourite theories and pronouncements are common talk in the neighbourhood. It is true, of course, that young delinquents are among the cinema's best—or, at least, most assiduous patrons. But this may be because they have indulgent parents, or because it is the only comfortable place they know, because some are "escapists", or because they have too little initiative to make or find spare-time occupations. These circumstances are all contributing causes of delinquency, so that the excessive cinema-going to which they may lead is in such cases merely a symptom, not

the trouble itself. The small boy before the court hopes that the magistrate will concentrate on the simple fact of cinema-going as a habit which, once broken, will make everything all right; he knows, however, that some magistrates consider that the kind of thing the children see in the cinema is a direct incentive to crime. The boy always accommodating, is prepared to admit this also, and to give a circumstantial account of how his offence was faithfully copied from something he had seen on the screen. Without, however, giving too much weight to what a child may quite seriously believe to be the motive for his actions, we should be foolish to deny that films do indeed exert a profound effect on children. What is really difficult to discover and analyse, however, is the exact nature of this effect.

Emotion v. Intellect

The trouble is that films provide a visual experience which we can only investigate in verbal terms. A child's description of a film he has seen tells us less about its effect on him than the manner, the tone of voice, the gestures with which he describes it. If we wish him not merely to describe the film to us, but to give an account of the effect it had on him, we are likely to find that this is beyond his powers. We are forced, therefore, to rely on observations of his reactions, and the explanation of these is largely a matter of surmise. It should, however, be possible to devise simple tests which would throw some light on this problem. Some work in this direction has been done with instructional films, but we are concerned with emotional rather than intellectual effects, and these should be tested in relation to the kind of film seen in the commercial cinema. Without verified and objective data gathered under test conditions it is unwise and even dangerous to draw general conclusions. To gather such data is going to be difficult. The feelings of a child about a film are probably vague and unorganised and — the eternal problem of the psychologist — the number of variables in the situation is very large.

We are familiar with the excited tone of a boy's description of an adventure film. And no one who has attended a children's matinee will readily forget the cheers and boos which accompany the performance. Here the excitement is overwhelming, but in schools children treat instructional films, once they have got used to the novelty, sensibly and critically. The overt reactions of children seeing films vary according to the circumstances in which they happen to be — whether with their parents in a predominantly adult audience, with other children at a children's show, or seeing them in school. The mental "set" of the child is influenced

by these circumstances and he approaches the film in each case in a different frame of mind. Perhaps the most important factor is the way in which his critical apparatus is working. Children are lively critics but they tend to concentrate on the story of a film, accepting whatever Hollywood cares to give them in the way of acting, direction and photography.

The Moral Instinct

Their attitude to the story is predominantly a moral one. Though the hero may be a gangster, he will have the children's support if he is brave, helps the weak, foils the deceitful, plays straight with his friends. Any falling short from this standard of conduct will instantly lose him the children's support. In one "western", when the hero's horse was made to attack the villain with his forelegs, a shudder went round the young audience. That was breaking the implied rules of the game. It would be safe to say that no delinquent child has modelled his conduct on that of the villain, though a number may have seen in his technique interesting possibilities of experiment.

This attitude of the child may give a clue to the way he may be led to a more useful approach to films. The cinema is obviously one of the major social forces of the modern world — a fact which has been very clearly realised in Russia for some time past. But cinema-going as a social habit is not quite the same thing as seeing films. Indeed, in so far as cinema-going replaces more active recreations it deserves the title of "drug" which has been (perhaps a little too freely) bestowed. The film is a mode of expression *sui generis*, and, like the theatre, the concert hall, the library, and the art gallery deserves a responsive (as opposed to a receptive) audience. This problem of attitude is no new one, but the twentieth century has seen it change from a matter of private conscience to one of social

urgency. In those periods when the arts were mainly the recreation of the dilettante it mattered little if his eyes were glazed and his mind numbed. But nowadays the radio, the cinema, cheap books and periodicals have made the whole public not merely interested in, but largely dependent on such sources for the substance of their mental life. The manner of this life can be affected by guidance in the means of approach.

Film Appreciation

So, as usual, it all comes back to the teacher. In the days when we ploughed through "Eng. Lit.", we were supposed to discover standards of taste which would help us in later life. Those of us who did not contract permanent indigestion in the process found, especially if we were blessed with an intelligent teacher, that there was revelation in the search. In the same way teachers can guide and encourage children to criticise and appreciate films. It is good psychology to begin this part of their education with an analysis of simple technical terms and to split up the complex processes of picture-making into some of its component parts. There is, however, a danger that the whole thing may become too formal. If the cinema comes to school it must come as a vitalising influence—not mainly as an object for dissection. The attitude of children to films can be made more positive and their standards of judgment can be made fully conscious. But the emotional effect must not be lost. Rather should it be encouraged—and given an outlet.

Teachers must learn, too

At present a great many teachers, probably the large majority, are quite illiterate where films are concerned. The average discussion in a staff common-room is not markedly different

from that in a shop, bus, or factory. Yet the interest in films in schools is widespread and is increasing. It should not be confined to instructional films. In my view there is a danger that the school film may be divorced from the entertainment film in the child's mind. If the schools break down the entertainment film into mere grammatical analysis they will simply provide solid grounds for the divorce. If, on the other hand, they approach the cinema as an established feature of the modern sense and use it as a medium for widening experience—experience that is based on a conscious and critical attitude of mind, experience which is exciting and leads to new discoveries and new activities, which is real, here and now, and is not dull preparation for the future—then the schools and the children will gain, and a public will grow up which knows and demands what it wants from the cinema.

We began by mentioning a boy in a Juvenile Court. If he goes from there to an Approved School, he will almost certainly find it equipped with a sound projector. The Approved Schools use films as part of their educational scheme and the Home Office encourages them by financial assistance and (with the help of the British Film Institute), by advice. Feature films are regularly shown. It would, perhaps, be too much to claim that the policy regarding such films is either clearly understood or properly applied in all these schools, but the Approved Schools do recognise that children ought to know how to use the cinema. While those most intimately associated with juvenile delinquents do not regard it as a present menace they do recognise its possibilities as a future source of experience. What kind of experience that will prove to be depends on those who have the responsibility of leading the search.

Considered in Committee

By J. E. SEWELL of *The Daily Telegraph*

TO TALK of how one judges a film—to open up the back of one's critical faculty, and expose the delicate mechanism ticking over within—is surely a most perverse form of exhibitionism. Why not a trepanning operation on the skull, in some suitably public place, or perhaps filmed in technicolour?

When I like a film, I consider it is a good film. When I dislike a film, I consider it is a bad film. When I am indifferent to a film, I regard it as an indifferent sort of film. What more can anyone in modesty say?

And yet, how much more there is to be said, not in modification of that stiff-necked attitude, but in amplification of it. Consider the *nuances*. Can one not admire a film, yet dislike it? Can one not disapprove of a film, yet like it? Can one, in fact, ever be wholehearted in one's likes or dislikes, or even in one's indifferences?

Wrong but readable

In print, of course, one can. One must. For a critic must necessarily find somebody to read him, and a column of "hum and ha" is read by nobody. For that matter, in a war-time newspaper, if justice is done to the "hum", there is rarely room for the "ha".

Thus arises, behind the seeming simplicity of my personal likes and dislikes, my private system of committees and priorities. The opinions which I allow from time to time to slip out into print are the lucky ones. By publishing them, I have created a vested interest in them, and my internal committees have often been very worried in the selection of them.

Still, when they are at last produced, they are my own. I would not presume to tell any man, woman or child what

he, she or it *should* think about a film. Nor will I seek to tell them what everybody else *will* think about a film. I cannot, infallibly, spot losers, let alone winners. I am, in fact, neither schoolmaster nor tipster. My hope is that people with minds rather like mine will go to the films that I (on the whole) like, and stay away from the films that I (on the whole) do not like. People with minds unlike mine will find their film criticism some other where, and good luck to them.

So much by way of apology for the personal approach; the first-personal pronoun is a confession of weakness. But I think my internal committees, who decide, in the end, what I shall present to the world as my considered opinion, deserve some inspection—they are in a way my *bona-fides*, and they work reasonably hard.

Opinion revised

In the first place, they call me to order. When that mine eyes did first Gene Tierney see, methought she purged the air of pestilence. My internal committee asked me whether I proposed to insist upon this curious impression, or whether I was prepared to admit that she could not act, and that the film-play in which she was presented (I had enjoyed it) was drivel. Reluctantly, though with a great show of firmness, I took the committee's view.

We had, I remember, a pretty nasty set-to on the subject of Garbo in *Two-faced Woman*. Could we condemn her for not rescuing that dreary nonsense? Could we, on the other hand, praise her efforts when so obviously they fail? Should we not have dismissed the film with faint praise if anybody but Garbo

had been playing the lead? The chairman cast his vote, and we gave it a sour little notice—or maybe it was a kind little notice, I forget—but all that we could really decide upon was the littleness of the notice.

Citizen Kane

Then there was *Citizen Kane*. I lacked—I still lack—the vast background of some of my colleagues who have been seeing on the average four films a week for the past ten, fifteen and twenty years. I can well understand how the thing was, to them, *épatante*. To me, it was a highly stimulating and interesting effort devoted to a tedious little end. I do not believe in the Citizen. I see no reason why anybody should have put himself to the trouble of building a satirical film around such an obvious sawdust dummy.

But it was a satirical film, and that was something. Far more important, the art of using the camera for dramatic ends had been given a terrific fillip. Was I, by implication, to suggest that R.K.O. did not deserve to see the colour of their money again? Was I on the other hand, to tell my public that it would enjoy a film which, frankly, interested me far more because of what it might mean to film history than for what it actually was? I wrote a notice which conspicuously declined to glow but which was equally definitely favourable, if you were interested in film technique. But to this day my internal committees are arguing about it.

Finally, let us turn up the minutes on Abbott and Costello. We had never laughed at Abbott and Costello much. To our cheerfulest member they had never been more than slightly funny, and he (blasé creature) says that he used to laugh at their stuff when he was a boy, and that habit dies hard. My committee, however, was in no position to doubt that millions of our

fellow-men were rolling in the aisles over Abbott and Costello. We decided to duck. We decided that our raging members—for a comedian who fails to make us laugh must naturally make us angry—would have to admit that this was a private rage that we had no right to inflict on the public. So we bowed ourselves out of the cinema in three lines.

My committees are useful and necessary, and I would not be without them. But surely, you will say, they have some positive standards to work with?

Ultimate Values

You are right, and I must come out from behind my ambush, an unrepentant dramatic critic. My ultimate values—the values on which my committees work—are Aristotle's Own—plot, character, direction, decoration, in that order. I believe that drama, for most people, is a fundamental need, almost, though not quite, like food and shelter. I believe that it is the job of the films to satisfy that psychological need, just as it used to be the job of the theatre. I believe that the more efficiently the films satisfy that need (much virtue in that word "efficiently"), the better worth while they are.

So here are my values—the values which I have brought with me from the theatre, and which, so far, I have seen reason to change only in detail.

First in importance is the story. It should engage my imagination, and therefore I should be able to believe in it. And that means that I should be able to believe in the characters involved in it—or at all events not disbelieve in them. I want to be made anxious about what happens next.

Next, I want to meet real people on the screen—not necessarily people like myself, but people whom I can recognise as true to life as I know it. That may be part of the story, but I think there are a lot of other factors at work

besides the script-writer. If they must be unreal, let them be extraordinary in a human way, like W. C. Fields, so that I can still recognise them, even when I know they can never exist.

Direction is Important

Third comes direction, permeating everywhere, and far more important than it could ever be in the theatre. Taking for granted the essentials—smoothness, movement, appreciation of character—I still value the little surprises of which only the good directors are capable, the ways of saying things, even the order of saying them, which are not obvious.

Acting comes fourth; but I doubt whether, with superlative direction, one need worry very much about it, whatever the neon lights used to say. A certain competence is obviously needed. Beyond that there is nothing more than publicity, and one or two exceptions to the rule.

Camera-work, with me, comes fifth, though, like direction, it permeates all. I like it to be unobtrusive but effective, as in *Hatter's Castle*, not assertive and insistent, as it is in *Citizen Kane*, though I recognise the value of this

sort of disturbance occasionally. Blaspheming, I believe that in the whole of film history, no single film has been ruined by bad photography, when the story, the characters, the direction and the acting were all good.

Décor only a Trimming

Decoration is a last trimming. One misses it when it is away, but one tends to dismiss it when it is present. I have rarely praised a film for its scenery or its dresses. I like them to be appropriate, and if they are not, I may complain. That is all.

Those are my most important values in film criticism—and, as the parliamentary candidate said, if you don't like them, I am prepared to alter them. In other words, I may be wrong, even to myself. In the matter of films, I am tentative, hesitatingly putting forward my own point of view, hesitatingly wondering whether I can possibly be so often right as I suppose I am. My internal committees do their best, but there are powerful voices on them, whom I have often overridden, when I thought I saw cause. It is all very difficult, but it is good fun.

Running a Specialist Theatre

described by

Herbert Cohn, Manager of The Tatler at Chester

I HAVE been asked to write an article on managing a specialised theatre during the war. The first thing that strikes me in attempting to carry out this request is that my opinions must inevitably be extremely controversial, but that very fact is all to the good, for it demonstrates the enormous task that lies before those responsible for the film public's entertainment and in-

struction, having as they do to satisfy such a variety of tastes and prejudices—I say satisfy deliberately because I think most people like those things only which are likened to their own beliefs or emotions.

My observation leads me to think that a really scientific distribution of films would necessitate the grading of all the cinemas in the country into

groups, each of which would be earmarked for certain films according to its public, and films would be produced for the purpose of one particular group.

Whilst this is obviously not possible under our present system, I do think that short propaganda films could be made with two different types of audience in mind, and that they could be distributed accordingly. Under the present system, the independent exhibitor has, in my view, a far greater chance of creating a definite type of public for his theatre than any large circuit can have, as he is able to choose his films at least to some extent, according to the public he requires, whilst the big organisations in booking films for hundreds of theatres, frequently put films obviously destined for one group only, into other groups where they are quite unsuitable.

The Public Taste

In dealing with the question of public taste in entertainment films at the present time, the first obvious reaction one has from all classes of the community is the desire to see comedy; I think in the last resort this even applies to the large female public who so thoroughly enjoy romantic tragedy. The fact that we have so few scenario writers capable of writing good comedy stories is a continual surprise to me, and I hope that attempts are being made to develop this art. It is probable that apart from this particular choice, which I believe always manifests itself in war-time, the same type of films that received the plaudits of the mass of the people in peace-time, will still hold their appeal. I do not believe there is any particular enthusiasm on the part of the public for feature propaganda films, although obviously if enormous publicity is given to them, they will want to see such films, if only for the reason of being able to discuss them. It is my firm opinion that large

numbers of people are very much more critical now than they were in the past, and that it is necessary for such pictures to be more subtle to have the required effect than any I have so far seen. Were the general war conditions more in our favour than they are at the moment, it is possible that those films which are being put out now would have the effect of leaving a deeper impression; for this reason it would seem, from a psychological point of view, necessary to produce and distribute such films extremely quickly, and that they should bear the mark of the war situation at the time that they are made.

News Reels Criticised

With regard to the news reels I am very strongly of the opinion that there has been a continual falling off in the interest shown by audiences during the past year, with of course the exception of the really big items such as the Churchill-Roosevelt meeting, the reason for this being the great similarity between them all. I think people are a little tired of seeing tanks and aeroplanes without apparent end. I have also noticed for some time, a rather unfortunate reaction to political speeches in the news, which are made by some of our greatest politicians, through the fact that the speaker is obviously reading the speech, the general public seem to have a very deep-rooted feeling that the men that rule our affairs should be able to show histrionic ability on the platform, and whilst this is obviously a fundamental misconception, it would perhaps be better not to film those who read their speeches, or to make it far less obvious through the medium of the camera work. I have had very many remarks made to me on this point. If it were possible for the news reels to forget the war altogether fairly frequently, I think it would be a great improvement, and more interest would

be shown in the war items later; there is at the present time a surfeit.

Ministry of Information Films

The effect of the Ministry of Information short pictures is extremely difficult to analyse, on account of the varying qualities of the films in both entertainment and propaganda values—some of these films are received extremely well and others with boredom. My impression is that those productions which show scenes that are familiar to the masses, are the ones which carry the message best. Those which are ninety per cent symbolical of the end point to be put over to the audience are, I think, futile—even if very good entertainment. In many cases, the life shown on the screen of a particular individual in one of the services does not ring true, and I think this is quickly noticed. A fairly recent nurse recruiting film was a good example of this point.

I should not like to miss this opportunity of drawing attention to what I consider to be a really serious fault on the part of various interested parties in the distribution of such Government sponsored films as *Target for Tonight*. This film was given to, I think, three circuits on its release, and the theatre which I manage was not given an opportunity to show it, in spite of the fact that our policy has been to show every Ministry of Information and Crown Film Unit film available—and the circuits have no such record as that which we have had of consistently showing these films. This position is intolerable and does not show up our trade arrangements in a very good light.

Nevertheless despite everything, I am convinced that the specialist theatres are doing a good job even though we have a long way still to go in our efforts. Ultimately we shall reap the reward of many years of patient effort.

In France To-day

A WELL-INFORMED correspondent writes from Lisbon:

Making bricks without straw is nothing compared with the difficulties encountered by French film producers struggling to keep their industry alive without film stock, sound apparatus, chemicals or materials for constructing sets. The famous Lumière factory at Lyons, for instance, one of the main places where film stock is made, is threatening to close down owing to lack of celluloid. Although there is plenty of plastic material available, which is the basis of the studio sets, there is no grease available which is necessary to knead it into shape. Canvas is completely unobtainable and at Nice, studio artists make door to door visits especially to the local butchers to get any form of old sacking which can be used as backcloths. The German seizure of metals has meant shortage of nails, and recently when Ivan Noe made the film *Les Hommes sans Peur* and needed 500 kilogrammes of nails to make his sets he was forced to use glue instead. Chemicals for the development of films are almost unprocurable.

Unoccupied France now only possesses three sets of sound recording apparatus and four or five film cameras. The result is that hundreds of film actors and technicians are out of work. Another sad story concerns a recent film in which was a scene where the star Jules Berry had to open a bottle of champagne. For some reason or another the scene had to be re-shot but as there was no other bottle available the same one had to be recorked and used over again. In the end the scene was cut as the champagne steadfastly refused to bubble!

Whither the Short?

asks

Andrew Buchanan

IT SEEMS to have been forgotten that the industry arose from short films. The feature was a development—star-studded, imaginative—and its effect was that makers of shorts began to realise that the little film had a mission of its own. As a result numerous series appeared presenting non-fictional subjects—glimpses of distant lands, informational titbits, topicalities, sport and so on, whilst two-reel comedies found a special place.

In those early days it was worth while to produce and distribute shorts as they supplemented single features being fundamentally different from them.

The Short's rôle

This *separateness* of the short, though an elementary fact, does not appear to have been appreciated by distributors and exhibitors, thinking and acting as they invariably do in terms of footage, and so it cannot have occurred to them that the elimination of shorts from cinema programmes not only deprives the public of seeing vital material which cannot reach the screen in any other form, but also prevents film from fulfilling the important function of presenting reality in creative fashion. The Double-Feature unrolling its terrifying length all over the place caused the death of the voluntarily produced short, despite the fact that the public had grown to like it.

It was no longer possible to make a living producing shorts at a time when, technically and creatively, they had

reached high and important standards. From that day to this—or nearly this—any daring soul who decides to make shorts to supply the limited demand created solely by the Quota to counter-balance outputs of American shorts (which always seem to find screen space) will either receive the offer of a “cash sale”, the sum being almost sufficient to pay for less than half the film stock he exposed on production, or a distribution contract composed of fascinating clauses which make it resemble the will of a millionaire, with lots of ribbons and seals dangling from it. His, the producer's, share of the bookings during the first sixty months (which are the worst) has been known to amount to as many pounds. It would seem, therefore, that the only people to realise the essential value of shorts, as distinct from their use to meet quota demands, and fill up odd corners, are those who make them, and the public which, until the war, was deprived by the industry of seeing them.

What Documentary did

It is at this juncture that something happened which must never be forgotten by us, or the short film makers who come after us—the stand taken by Documentalists, and the way they turned commercial defeat into victory. Documentary production has been bombarded with criticism from every side, and a great deal of it has been justified, but what the movement did to counteract the ruthless attitude of the industry makes a milestone in the

progress of film, dwarfing all else. Documentalists said, in so many words:

Our product is reaching a pinnacle. It is supplying to the screen what neither Double, Treble, nor a million features can provide. It has been squeezed out of the cinema at the moment when it can be of tremendous service to mankind. Very well, we will build up our own distribution. We'll see that our films are shown up and down the country and across the world, and that they become independent of 'cinemas in chains'. Moreover, we shall find new audiences, which will bring a new vitality and broader horizons to the cinema, and demand *new* types of films.

And they did!

The Short in war time

The laying of those foundations before the war enabled makers of shorts to cope with governmental demands at the outbreak of hostilities. Upon the shoulders of a comparative handful of people rests the responsibility of projecting national policy, not only at home, but overseas. The short has re-entered the cinema from which it was ousted, but now in an official capacity, and in carrying out its important work, it has made the public more "short-conscious" than ever before. That has brought us to-day, but what of tomorrow? Should the short rest content with the fact that, by serving the Government during the present crisis, it has regained cinema screen space?

Should the widespread and important sponsoring of shorts by scientific, industrial and professional bodies, which will certainly continue and probably increase in the future, be all-satisfying?

I think not, for whilst the importance of films so sponsored and released both in Britain and abroad cannot be overstressed, the simultaneous production of an ever-increasing number of shorts, unrelated to propaganda in the conventional sense of the word,

will be necessary to enable them to regain a *legitimate* place in the cinema programme, and thus secure maximum expression. That is, exhibitors shall pay for shorts, as they pay for features.

Just as to-day, the theatrical and non-theatrical distribution of sponsored shorts run parallel, so, in the future, shorts sponsored for specific purposes, and those designed for commercial cinema release, should, if correctly interrelated by short filmmakers, *strengthen* each other.

Under normal conditions, sponsored films cannot, by their nature, form other than an irregular output, depending, as they do, upon the non-commercial cinema requirements of the various bodies for which they are made, whereas general theatrical release needs to be continuous and regular. Thus, what one type of production lacks would be provided by the other. In a sentence, the documentary film must become as legitimate a part of every programme as is the news reel (and there the comparison ends).

Back to single features

Maybe, as a result of war hovering over the studios of both Britain and America there will be a reduction in the output of features, and that might mean a reversion to single-feature programmes.

But single features need the supply of shorts!

Well, that would be one way in, but should things not turn out like that, Documentalists, busy though they will surely be on sponsored production, will need to set up the second milestone on their epic journey, and hew their way through the Double-Feature forest of footage, and keep on until they have forced open a space on the cinema screen, encouraged throughout the struggle by the knowledge that the public will welcome their success.

News from New York

HERMAN G. WEINBERG

I HATE to fly in the face of the critical accolade showered so munificently on *Woman of the Year*, the new Katharine Hepburn picture, since everyone here is calling it "the picture of the year" (which is absurd with the year still having ten months to go), but I found it dull. Juxtaposing a lady journalist of the "high world" with a sports writer (Spencer Tracy) of the "low world", then spinning out for two hours all the *gauche* things that can happen as a consequence, that the scenarists could think up, is not my idea of adult entertainment. One knows from the first reel how it is all going to end, that the worm will turn and the self-sufficient lady journalist will be chastened by her long-suffering husband. Housewives will laugh, with an air of superiority, over her fumbling attempts to cook up breakfast for her spouse, but I submit that men will only find the scene exasperating, sympathise with Tracy, and recall that classic remark of the newly-wed groom to his young bride at the first breakfast she has so badly prepared for him, "My God, can't you even cook?"

Ball of Fire is better, but only by comparison. A sort of whimsical cross between *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and a gangster film, it also juxtaposes "high" and "low" worlds for laughs, but succeeds occasionally in getting them, chiefly because of the comparative originality of the idea, namely, the search on the part of a professor and his six scholarly aides for the derivations of the slang and *argot* of modern life. That's how Gary Cooper meets Barbara Stanwyck. But the film's whimsy is spoiled by exaggerations of character delineation and slang usage,

so that one loses faith even in the film's premise, which is too bad because this one might have been a charming comedy had it been leavened with a streak of reality as Frank Capra would have done it.

Prudish Hollywood

The Man Who Came to Dinner proved again how prudish and afraid of its own shadow Hollywood is by having all the sting taken out of it that was so uproariously successful in the play. Some of the best lines are missing from the watered-down film version, and the acidly drawn rôles of Sheridan Whiteside, Banjo, Beverly and Lorraine Sheldon, have been substituted with Sunday School characterisations. Even Monty Wolley's playing of the same part he did so triumphantly on the stage has lost most of its verve without some of the missing *mots justs* with which Kaufman and Hart provided him. I love Jimmy Durante but he's just not Banjo—he lacks the cloven hoof. Reggie Gardiner is surprisingly inept as Beverly. Besides which, both parts were considerably censored. Ann Sheridan would seem to have been ideally cast as Lorraine Sheldon, and in a full-blown, lusty transfilming of the play she might have "gone to town" in the part, but Ann Sheridan and the censor's shears don't mix. It's the difference between the sophistication of Broadway and the provincialism of Hollywood. American movie audiences are still regarded as adults with arrested development.

I should also like to temper my previous remarks on *Sullivan's Travels*, which I still think is literate, occasionally witty, and nicely wrought, with

the observation, on a second viewing of the film, that it is also snobbish, superior and condescending; that it is not concerned with human beings but with attractive puppets; that its major premise, that comedy is a solace to the ills of the poor, is an impertinence. I admire Sturges' attempt to paint his comedy in occasional sombre tones, as a daring experiment on the part of a fascinatingly fresh new talent, but if he's got no more heart than this then he should go back to the formula of *The Lady Eve*, where he had no sympathy for any of his characters. The result there was diamond-hard. Lubitsch could turn from the cynicism of *The Marriage Circle* to the compassion of *Broken Lullaby*, but Sturges is not yet a Lubitsch, however graceful his tribute to him in *Sullivan's Travels*.

Poor Propaganda

We have had two new anti-Nazi films, *Paris Calling*, with refugee Elisabeth Bergner, and *Joan of Paris*, with refugee Michele Morgan. Alas that they should both be so uninspired, that the actress who once played *Saint Joan* so memorably should be so listless in such a rôle, and that the fragile beauty of Michele Morgan (so unforgettable in *Quai des Brumes*) should have been cast in the same old Hollywood mould to come out looking no different than Betty Grable or Joan Crawford. *Joan of Paris*, at least, has several moments that come to life, such as the persistent Gestapo agent (well played without a line of dialogue by Alexander Granach), an occasional "Fritz Lang touch" of the macabre, and an oddly apt bit of casting, Laird Cregar as the Nazi *gauleiter* of Paris. But never for a moment do you believe what is happening. It's all staged, nothing is revealed. You start fidgeting long before the end. Are these films, then, the spiritual weapons of democracy? Rudolph Arnheim once suggested an anti-Nazi film to be directed by Erich von Stroheim. Until something along

this order is done, I don't see how we can really be satisfied with the possibilities inherent in such a theme. Chaplin has made his memorable contribution. Lubitsch has completed his, *To Be or Not To Be*. Where is Milestone's, Vidor's, Ford's, Capra's? Why leave it to the second-raters, for the most part? This is a theme for titans. Where is Orson Welles'? And where, indeed, is von Stroheim's, the titan of them all?

New Documentaries

Which leaves me with just space enough to mention two documentary films of special interest, *Native Land*, by Leo Hurwitz and Paul Strand, a reenactment of violations of American civil liberties, as uncovered by a Congressional investigation, and *Our Russian Front*, a brief compilation of Soviet news reels by Lewis Milestone and Joris Ivens, giving an impressionistic account of Russia's magnificent stand on the Eastern front. The former is a lean, oft-times savage exposé of anti-union terrorism that resulted in the strengthening of labour unions throughout America.

The film, as was the investigation, is a healthy sign of America's capacity for self-criticism. But it is even more than that. In how many remaining places in the world to-day could such a film be made?

The New Lubitsch

I HAVE just previewed the new Lubitsch comedy, *To Be or Not To Be*, co-starring Jack Benny and the late Carole Lombard, whose recent accidental death shocked everyone. Only during the first minutes of her appearance does the pain of seeing her, in the knowledge of her subsequent tragic death, disturb one. Afterwards, such is the magic of the screen, one forgets it and becomes absorbed in the suspense and laughter Lubitsch has conjured out of an extravagant scenario (by himself and Melchior Lengyel) kidding the pants off Hitler and the Nazis.

Joseph and Maria Tura are the idols of the Warsaw stage just before the German invasion of Poland in 1939. When the Gestapo takes over, they and their colleagues of the Teatr Polski become active in an underground movement to sabotage the occupation. A Polish flyer, who always walked out on Joseph Tura's soliloquy, "To be or not to be . . .", in *Hamlet*, to keep a rendezvous with Maria Tura, joins the actors, who masquerade as Gestapo agents and Nazi officers, finally effecting the assassination of a Polish Quislingite and the escape of the trio, Joseph, Maria and the flier, to England.

That's all there is to the story, but Lubitsch has used it well to provide him with many broad laughs at the expense of Nazism and all the sheep dip it

symbolises. There is little of the subtlety that once distinguished the work of this director; for his earlier manner of employing irony of attack and the dry wit of understatement he substitutes broad, robust satire that cannot be missed by even the most backward members of an audience. An essay might be written on the 100 per cent Americanisation of Ernst Lubitsch but we won't attempt it now. Suffice it to say that Jack Benny (never so restrained and therefore never before so good) and Carole Lombard play Joseph and Maria in high good humour and the whole thing, for all its extravagances, comes off more successfully as an anti-Nazi film than anything we have had since *The Great Dictator*, both being, thus far, Hollywood's two greatest contributions to the war effort.

Evelyn Russell on This Quarter's Films

THE CROWN Unit, having made an indelible mark in the air with *Target for Tonight*, have left that field to others and gone over to the army. *Wavell's* 30,000, is an extremely well made and important documentary which everyone should see. The Libyan Campaign takes on a completely new aspect for the layman when he sees the sort of thing that has happened and will go on happening out there while the war lasts. I would recommend, for a similar reason, *In the Rear of the Enemy*, the first Russian film depicting actual fighting in the Arctic that we have received. It has been made by the Moscow Soviet Youth Film Studio. The actual photography and dramatic production are exciting and convincing enough of themselves, but with Herbert Marshall's quite brilliant synchronisation of English dialogue to the

lip movement of Russian-speaking actors the illusion is terrific.

The Big Blockade I remember especially for Frank Cellier's performance as the typical German commercial traveller and the amusing navicert explanation—with actions—by Will Hay and Bernard Miles. Some of the fantasy, I felt, misfired, but on the whole the Ministry of Economic Warfare has been well served by Ealing Studios. What a forceful commentator Frank Owen is, to be sure!

Association of ideas leads me to *All that Money Can Buy*, an unusual film that is by no means everybody's choice but is worth seeing for Walter Huston's performance as "Scratch", better known to you and me as the Devil.

Olsen and Johnsen were probably also interested in "scratch"—but from quite a different angle—when they

thought of *Hellzapoppin*, clever-beyond-words film and the craziest comedy, which, if you like, you will love but which didn't amuse me at all. *Chacun à son gout*, of course, and all that.

I laughed a good deal, though, at *World Première*, and could bear to know who trained the monkey and the tiger. These two artists almost put some of the humans to shame good as were the humans. And I must admit a sneaking satisfaction in seeing such a beautiful debunking of that thing known as "the artistic temperament", but which is usually just bad temper.

Preston Sturges began the year here well with *Sullivan's Travels*, although, according to some American critics over there, America doesn't think much of it. For my part his comedy is grand and his drama just as good and Joel McCrea and Virginia Lake make an excellent job of both the laughter and the tears.

The New Garbo

Still, one man's meat is another man's poison, vide *Two-faced Woman*. What a fuss and palaver in America over nothing! Garbo and Douglas make a splendid pair and after all, they are married from almost the beginning of the film, and it is an "A" film, isn't it? Versatility is Miss Garbo's long suit now and not mystery. May it continue so.

What a pity that Richard Llewellyn elected to sell the rights of *How Green Was My Valley* in America! It should have been made in our own Welsh Wales, though for the life of me I cannot think of a producer here who would have made a better job of it than John Ford has done. Donald Crisp certainly surpasses in his characterisation of Mr. Morgan any performance of his that I have previously seen, and the obviously very carefully chosen cast do more than justice to the grand human story and admirable production.

The film for the man in the street,

however, is undoubtedly *H. M. Pulham, Esq.* Here is my life-story—or yours—if you are forty or thereabouts. All the might-have-beens and the if-onlys and yet-perhaps-things-are-really-better-as-they-are. Robert Young gives an understanding and sensitivity to the characterisation of Harry Pulham that puts him right at the top of the class, and Ruth Hussey is quite definitely the girl he grew up with and married. Hedy Lemarr as a career girl would have set any office staff by the ears, and that recently noticed and very fine actor Van Heflin makes Bill King live. Yet it is just your story—or mine—and I like it.

Colour—and what marvellous colour—this quarter has meant *Blood and Sand*. What beautiful photography especially in the early scenes—the young Juan striding in the moonlight to steal a practice fight with the bull in the rancher's private ring—the dazzling bull-ring sequences—lovely Rita Hayworth as the seducer of young men—Laird Cregar as the critic, what an artist he is, to be sure. Yes, an unforgettable production in spite of its shortcomings.

War Films

There seems to have been a lovely game of "follow-my-leader" in the film industry this quarter, inevitable, I suppose, with the war uppermost in the minds of the majority, so having been regaled with *A Yank in the R.A.F.*, *Ships with Wings*, etc., and blessed with *Target for Tonight*, we have *Dive-Bomber*, *Captains of the Clouds*, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, and several others, the titles of which have escaped me. Generally speaking, there has been great similarity in plot and type of characters. Even *Captains of the Clouds*, with its beautiful colour photography, admirable direction and the very excellent acting of James Cagney, Brenda Marshall, Alan Hale, and a most able cast of supporting

players has the "bomb-shell" love interest that has seemed to inspire for flying films the "mixture-as-before" description usually reserved for Westerns. Maybe that is why I was more impressed with *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*; it has none of this "temptation" angle. Its presentation is exciting, using, as it does, what would seem to be the end of the story as its beginning, interpolating credits, and then, by understatement stressing, paradoxically, the hazards of our men who bale out in occupied territory. The photography is extremely good, in one or two instances quite brilliant, and the direction masterly. Michael Powell, who was responsible for *49th Parallel*, Emeric Pressburger and every artist and technician concerned all deserve the highest compliment.

Then who thought of Paris first? We have made *This was Paris*, and from America we have *Paris Calling*. Both deal with the fall of France, refugees on the road, underground movements,

etc. Topical interest saves both films from complete mediocrity, but *This was Paris* can be more easily swallowed than *Paris Calling*—in spite of Elizabeth Bergner. What a curious piece of casting—this? So many other actresses could have done justice to the part of Marianne, and Bergner has qualities away beyond the opportunities offered here. The same criticism applies to the casting of Marlene Dietrich as Fay Duval in *Manpower*, the Warner production in which Edward G. Robinson and Alan Hale give such fine performances. But Marlene with no glamour is, I swear, a great loss to most cinema-goers, especially when one feels, as I did, that she herself misses it, too. Fortunately, the film itself is so strong, so vividly produced that it will probably be a big success and my criticism laughed at. I don't mind.

Summing it all up, it seems to me that the quality of direction and production has been higher this quarter than usual. What do you think?

Children's Matinées

Contributed by ODEON THEATRES

EVER SINCE the very early days of improved and developed cinema entertainment it was quite clear that there was a great need amongst the children for programmes that were specially suitable for them, at a time and on a day when they would be free and anxious to attend. It was obvious that the great majority of films shown to adults could not firstly be of interest to the children, nor could they have a fine influence on the child mind. Nevertheless, the children's response to films, when they were shown them, was so vital and so enthusiastic that a great demand was created and it could not be ignored.

To meet this demand, in 1937 the late Mr. Oscar Deutsch decided to organise his existing children's matinée

performances in his own theatres into a unified movement, and to put them under the control of a committee, whose job it was to show, on Saturday mornings, in as many Odeon Theatres as possible, a programme of films, lasting about two hours, to child audiences, and to also develop their club functions and activities. The Committee, which was, of course, a domestic one, was not large, and each member was, in some way, actively responsible for some section of the Committee's work. They had a serious and responsible task—their terms of reference were first to decide upon the type of films they would book for the clubs, and to watch carefully for the children's reactions to their choice with a view to future booking.

They soon realised that they must have a special booking section, which could pre-view films and go carefully into the matter of the suitability of films offered by the Renting Companies, as well as merely the routine of dates, lengths of showing, etc., and this section was at once established and reported to the Committee at their fortnightly meetings on the product that was available and the extent of its suitability. The Committee also obtained reports from managers on the children's reactions to the films already shown at matinées, and they also attended shows themselves for the purpose of watching the children during the performance, talking to them, and deciding upon the choice of films.

Action Films

It was found by this investigation and by the managers' reports that the children insist upon films of action—they are enthusiastic admirers of western films, and no amount of "cow-boys" or Indians can ever prove to be too much for them. It was further found by this investigation that films of this type are in very little danger of causing bad effect psychologically—there was every indication that the children approved only of the "good influences" in the films, while the "villains" met with their distinct disapproval. Disney is a universal favourite—his appeal is unchallenged, and his artistry must have deep and abiding results. It should, however, be made clear here that with Disney's films as with all others, only those that are completely suitable for children of all ages are selected.

It is known that suspense is a necessary quality to drama—this is most certainly endorsed by an audience of children at the cinema, who are glad to leave their hero hanging desperately over a gaping precipice, ponder his situation for a whole week, and then arrive full of anticipation on the follow-

ing Saturday morning to see how he managed to get out of his dangerous position alive and well. . . .

Serials are liked

Serials are great favourites, the children practically demand them. So much for the children's own choice. There was, of course, product sufficient to supply these needs and to offer a certain amount of choice. There were no great difficulties regarding suitability, and from the available films selections were made on their artistic, educational and entertainment value.

The Committee then considered educational films and decided to show them when they were requested by say, the local Educational Authorities, or the Headmaster of a school in the vicinity of a club. Sometimes an entire programme was devoted to educational films, or else just one was included in the usual Saturday morning programme. As an example of the educational films shown I would give *First Principles of the Petrol Engine*—a film made and sponsored by the Petroleum Films Bureau. It is in documentary form, extremely well photographed, and is commented. Also included in programmes were films concerning health, such as *Practice Makes Perfect*—a film sponsored by the Dental Board, which deals with the treatment of teeth. The Committee were invited by the Board to see the film and were pleased to show it to all the clubs in the movement. Films concerning the safety of the roads were also shown.

Programme Balance

The main problem confronting the Committee was to choose films which would appeal to children of all ages, as the children's ages range from the very young to fifteen and sixteen. However, a Disney, a Western, a serial and then the specially requested or additional instructional films seemed to quite adequately fill the bill. News reels are

also shown when they are considered quite suitable.

There was, of course, no difficulty in testing the "audience reaction" after deciding upon the choice of films. The children at the cinema have no repressions—they boo loudly and lustily if the film bores them—they cannot, for instance, bear to see romantic episodes, and they are unable to concentrate on lengthy dialogue. Speed and action they acclaim with cheers, but for educational films they are extremely quiet and very interested.

The Value of Ritual

In September, 1939, the Committee controlled 170 Children's Clubs, with an attendance of approximately 150,000 children each week. Their activities had not been limited to the showing of films—a function important enough on its own. A standard routine or "ritual" was introduced, which was founded on a desire to instil into the children some principles of loyalty, responsibility and general good citizenship. They were given talks on road safety and their health—they elected their own committees to discuss such matters as likes and dislikes in films, competitions and collections, and they were organised to make collections for hospitals and all deserving causes.

During the course of the war the Committee decided, in the interests of safety, to close a great many clubs and their numbers were considerably reduced, while their following of children was relatively increased. However, the Committee have recently taken a further decision to re-open as many clubs as possible, where there are completely satisfactory conditions, and at present some clubs are in the process of re-opening.

As far as "war-time cinema" relates to the children, they are still seeing their usual programmes, but the Ministry of Information films are shown whenever they are suitable, as

is the news reel, and the children are also shown other films relating to the war, such as A.T.C. recruiting films, etc. Their other activities continue, and they are now enthusiastic collectors of waste paper, and scrap metal, and have been of great service to many local authorities.

Cheers for a Spitfire

Needless to say, there is strong response to the news reels when they are shown these days, and the Fascist leaders receive their fair share of boos, whilst the sight of even *one* Spitfire against the sky calls forth wild cheering from the audience.

We are convinced that these are the broad lines on which children's entertainment should be organised—after the war it is to be hoped that our pioneer efforts may be developed and expanded and that special children's matinees should exist in theatres throughout the country. We claim no exclusive rights in our discoveries—we wish only to make this movement, which has such great promise, a broad and useful function in our national culture.

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Non-Theatrical in America

by

Ezra Goodman

NON-THEATRICAL films—educational, scientific, cultural and documentary—are now facing the greatest task in educational history. "When men understand each other, they do not hate, and when they do not hate, they do not make war," Will Hays, president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, said recently. That is the ultimate aim of non-theatrical films. To-day they are helping carry the vital burden of explaining the various phases of the war to the public and the armed forces.

The visual factor in education has in recent years been recognised as a potent one and more and more schools have been adopting film methods of teaching, particularly in scientific and geographic subjects. Now a great new audience for non-theatrical films has arisen in the armed forces. The army, navy, air corps, coastguard, marines, etc., are enthusiastic audiences for educational and entertainment films, ranging from pictures on fire-prevention and safeguarding military secrets to the latest Deanna Durbin or Ginger Rogers movie.

Government Production

The sources of these films are many and varied. Leading producer of non-theatrical films today is the U.S. Government which next to Hollywood is the most important movie-manufacturing city in the United States. The various branches of the Government have been active in the film field in the past. Foremost among these have been the Department of Agriculture which

has turned out numerous films on crops and related subjects for farmers; the U.S. Bureau of Mines which has sixty different films on mine safety; the Departments of Interior, Labour and Treasury, the Bureau of Reclamation, the National Parks Service, the Department of Conservation and Development, and the Bureau of Fish and Game and Markets. Many State governments, including Ohio, Massachusetts, California, and New York, have their own film production units.

Government pictures are usually distributed free of charge or at a slight cost from Washington and sub-centres throughout the country. Hundreds of prints of each film are manufactured for wide distribution. The Navy, for instance, distributes films to hundreds of its show units from exchanges in New York, San Diego, etc. Sometimes the distribution rights to Government pictures are given to commercial distribution firms which then rent them out at a regular fee. The two famous Pare Lorentz Government documentaries, *The River* and *The Fight for Life*, were distributed as regular releases by Paramount and Columbia Pictures respectively through their nation-wide film exchanges. The new Walt Disney cartoon for the Treasury Department, *The New Spirit*, which is a plea for the prompt payment of income taxes to help defeat the Axis, has been distributed free of charge by the combined exchanges of all the Hollywood studios. It is clear that the Government can call upon the regular channels of film distribution to help circulate documentary and non-theatrical films.

Distribution

Now that the Government is actively engaged in the production of many educational and documentary pictures as part of the all-out war effort, non-theatrical distribution of these pictures for the public and the armed forces is looming large. These films embrace a variety of subjects, such as how to run factory equipment or recognise different types of planes. The U.S. Office of Education, for example, is turning out a series of fifty films on such technical themes as precision measurements, cutting tools, shipbuilding, etc. These pictures are being distributed by Castle Films at a low sale price. Castle Films is one of a dozen or so leading non-theatrical distribution firms in this country. This group includes the Ampro Corporation, Bell and Howell and the De Vry Corporation of Chicago, Jam Handy Pictures of Detroit, Commonwealth Pictures, Walter O. Gutlohn and Pathescope of New York and Eastman at Rochester. These firms distribute both 35 and 16 mm. sound and silent entertainment and educational films. They maintain film libraries throughout the country and also provide projection equipment.

Their biggest customers are schools and colleges with the armed forces and Civilian Conservation Corps running them a close second now. The armed forces prefer entertainment films, the schools go in for educational reels. Institutions, hospitals, prisons, film-study groups and other organisations compose the regular non-theatrical audience for these films.

The U.S. Department of Commerce Motion Picture Division made a survey of the non-theatrical distribution system in schools in 1941. The department sent a questionnaire to 28,277 public and private high schools and colleges throughout the United States and its territorial possessions. 17,500 replies were received. These

answers showed that the schools owned 12,443 16 mm. projectors, of which 6,059 were silent and 6,384 wired for sound; and 2,447 35 mm. projectors, of which 1,624 were silent and 823 sound. In other words, a high percentage of schools are now equipped with projectors. Those that are not can borrow or rent them easily.

Many of these schools are themselves vital distribution centres for non-theatrical films. The University of California, for instance, has a library of 5,000 16 mm. films, mostly silent, which are available at a small rental charge. A large number of schools are developing film study courses which are proving focal points for an interest in motion picture showings. Three years ago there were only 14 colleges offering regular screen courses here. To-day at least 53 have such complete courses, with 200 or more offering partial courses.

Hollywood's attitude

Hollywood stays away from the non-theatrical field because it competes with films in regular theatres. The studios are therefore loath to turn out films for educational use. However, the Commission on Human Relations of the Progressive Education Association has with the co-operation of various studios produced hundreds of human relations short subjects in the form of excerpts from existing non-current photoplays. The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, with the co-operation of Cecil B. De Mille and Professor James Shotwell made a feature film, *Land of Liberty*, a drama of American history compounded of sequences from 125 different pictures and news reels.

Other sources for non-theatrical distribution are the March of Time, which has made 16 mm. prints of many of its reels; the Museum of Modern Art Film Library in New York which distributes both 35 and 16 mm. features and short subjects to

study groups and schools for a regular fee and has daily showings of pictures in its auditorium; such industries as Ford and U.S. Steel, which produce and distribute documentaries free of charge; the Motion Picture Bureau of the Y.M.C.A. which distributes films to colleges, churches, clubs and societies, some of them without cost; and the Motion Picture Division of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, under the supervision of Kenneth Macgowan, which is engaged in the circulation of films about South

America in the United States and *vice versa*. This group has mobile units touring with films. Eastman, Bell and Howell, Erpi and other groups produce teaching films directly for classroom consumption.

The non-theatrical field to-day is a flourishing one. As it obtains more projection equipment and sets up additional film libraries where motion pictures are available at a low cost, it will grow in scope and importance until Hollywood will have to sit up and take notice.

What Historians Want

Dr. Rachel Reid

ENVY is one of the seven deadly sins; but it is one into which history teachers fall whenever they look at the wealth of film material available for teachers of geography, and consider how little is at their own disposal. Apart from about half-a-dozen films specially made for teaching purposes, of which *A Mediæval Village* is the outstanding example, there is little beyond a few so-called "historical" films—mere travesties of history—such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII*; *Marie Antoinette*; *Lady Hamilton*, and the *Suez Canal*, to name but a few. Whereas there are very many films of life and travel in other lands, packed with material which the geography teacher can use without more ado.

The reason is not far to seek. In the cinema, geographical truth pays; historical truth does not. The public is willing to pay to see films of life and travel in other lands, because some day they might themselves visit such places, and in any case the scenes contrast very pleasantly with those they see every day. But the public will not pay to see an historical film unless it

holds some familiar story dramatised out of all semblance of truth, tricked out with sentimentalities, and packed with anachronisms. Even if the utmost care were taken to keep as near the truth as may be, they would still be unhistorical. In the true sense, they are not reconstructions but dramatisations of the past; and to make a play at all, the characters have to be shown doing and saying things which we cannot by any means know that they did do or say. *Julius Cæsar* is a very great play; but the hero is not the Julius Cæsar of history. History can deal only with facts, not with surmisings. Even if historical truth could be attained, dramatisation of historical events would actually be a disservice to the teaching of history; for they rob the pupil of the incentive to use his own imagination to interpret the minds of men and women through their words and actions, which is not the least valuable part of the training that the study of history should give. Dramatisation *by* children, if you will; dramatisation *for* children, never.

Reconstructions of everyday life and even of historical episodes, when there is no pretence of showing real historical personages, are a very different matter. Interest is concentrated on what is done and how it is done, not on the people who do the things. Films like *The Covered Wagon* and *Man of Aran*, for instance, are of greatest value to history teachers; for they show how things must have happened, given certain tools and certain conditions. Particular incidents and remarks can be discounted, because the people concerned never existed. We need more of such films. Fortunately, they are profitable; so we may hope.

Give us illustrations

Even more useful, however, would be films illustrating the growth of civilisation. It is, after all, only bits of *A Man of Aran* that can be used for teaching, and we cannot afford to look at many such films during a term. The history teacher needs, above all, short films which can show in a few minutes what needs many words to make plain,—how men long ago did the things we do, and must do if we are to live at all—raise food, make clothes, build houses, make carts and ships, and so forth. Museums can show us the tools, the pots and pans, the looms, and the ploughs that men used long ago; but they cannot show us how they were used: the film can. In different parts of the world men are still doing everyday things in the way they were done here in the New, and even in the Old, Stone Age. Bushmen still use the digging-stick and prefer their meat raw; the Hunza still farm as men did all over Europe for centuries, and as

they still did in the Shetlands and Hebrides only a few years ago. Men still set up megaliths in India as Stonehenge and the Stone Circles of Brittany were set up; and they dig out and smelt iron ore west of Tanganyika as they must have done in Central Europe more than two thousand years ago. We want films of these things. And we want films of life in the towns of China and India as it must have been when Marco Polo and Vasco di Gama first saw them. Not films of Marco's journey and di Gama's voyage, but scenes such as must have met their eyes.

Possible Sources

Much of the material required for such films exists already in travel films and documentaries; and selection and arrangement are all that is needed to produce a considerable number of films of great value for the teaching of history. Most of them, as already indicated, would be quite short, merely showing how men did things with certain tools in certain conditions. But there is a place also for longer films tracing through a long period the development of some one craft or tool, such as iron-working or pottery making, the plough, or the ship. News reels too should be watched for material, especially for pictures of events which the trained historian instinctively knows are going to make history.

There is space only to mention the film which shows historical change diagrammatically. This, too, can be very useful, especially for revision work with older pupils; but its use is more limited than that of the other films. It is the making of these that we long to see taken in hand.

A HARD TASK

by the C. F. L. Librarian

ANY FILM Library at any time is bound to have plenty of problems. War-time conditions have increased the problems and at the same time increased the demand for films. The more films you have the more films you despatch and the more problems you have. There seems no way of avoiding this. You do not complain—not that it would do any good if you did—because it means the Library is doing its job. But it may be worth describing some of the problems to people who borrow films because they can reduce the problems and thereby help the Library to give borrowers better service.

C.F.L. Contents

The Central Film Library embraces the pre-war Empire and G.P.O. Film Libraries and the Ministry of Information Library. It now owns 11,000 copies of 720 different films. There are 2,500 copies of 450 different Empire films (including films about England); 600 copies of 60 G.P.O. films; and 8,000 copies of 210 films produced by the Ministry of Information or acquired by it. There are now some 6,000 organisations and individuals, civilian and military, borrowing films from the Library, some only occasionally but most of them at regular intervals.

You will see that on an average the Library holds 6 copies of each Empire film, 10 of each G.P.O. and 40 of each M.O.I. film. The Library is trying to maintain and increase the number of copies of the best films in the Empire and G.P.O. sections. But this is not at all easy. The negatives of many of the Empire films are in the country of origin and it is difficult

to get copies of films from Australia and Canada in these days. Then the 16-mm. printing laboratories are taxed beyond their capacity to meet the urgent demands of the Services and of the M.O.I. and, important as it is to maintain the supply of educational films, it is impossible not to allow the greater importance of training films for the Services, films on diphtheria immunisation and fire-fighting, or films about the war for showing to factory workers. For these reasons it is not possible to increase the number of copies of many of the pre-war Empire and G.P.O. films to the extent that would meet the increased demand for them. While this is so it is inevitable that all the copies of many of the films should be fully booked for months ahead, and very difficult for the Library to book specific films for specific dates.

Apply in Advance

Borrowers could do a great deal here to help themselves and the Library. You should always apply as much in advance as possible and never less than two weeks. If you can, apply for films for a regular day or days for several months in advance. Wherever you can, give the Library as much choice as possible. Let the Library know how many films or how long a programme you want (not exceeding 60–70 minutes) and what types of films you want on each date rather than specific titles. On the other hand, when you want specific films and no others on certain dates, make this quite clear in your application. Where there are several connected organisations borrowing films they should co-ordinate their requests

so that, for example, a school does not apply for *Into The Blue* for the 19th and the school A.T.C. for the 26th where they could arrange for it to be shown to both audiences on consecutive days.

To ensure that films reach borrowers on the day they are promised the Library has now to despatch films four or five days in advance of the booking date and to allow the same number of days for return. It is obvious, therefore, that it is more economical for the Library to book films for showing on three or four consecutive nights to different audiences than to send the films out on three or four separate occasions.

Please Return Quickly

This leads me to a number of points on despatch and return of films. Films are always despatched, as I have said, four or five days in advance, unless films are not in because some borrower has failed to return them promptly or has returned them damaged. If every borrower returned films immediately after the day or last day set out on the booking sheet sent to him, the Library's problems would be halved. They would be further decreased if all borrowers returned the films in the tins and boxes in which they are despatched. Receiving back *Merchant Seaman* in the tin labelled *Night Mail*, inside the box marked *Romantic India* wastes much valuable time. Often the confusion does not end there for the Library receives back films in another Library's containers.

There still remains the damage problem. The most efficient and careful projectionists have accidents but most of the damage done to films is not of this kind. There is no excuse for strained or torn perforations, or scratches down to the bases throughout the film, and even less for films returned with the opening titles or last

20 feet torn off. Almost always damage of this kind means that at least two subsequent bookings have to be cancelled or some other film substituted. I wonder if borrowers realise that the cost of printing a 400 foot reel of 16-mm. film is not less than £3. This Library and others too, I know, have had films ruined by the first borrower to whom they have been lent. There is rarely any doubt about the responsibility for the damage. Every film is carefully examined on its return from every booking before being sent out again, and while slight wear may be overlooked, gross damage is not. But do all projectionists realise that most damage is done *after* the film has passed through the gate and is not, therefore, seen on the screen or heard during projection?

A Few Pointers

If I end on very elementary points it is because they account for a large part of any Film Library's unnecessary work. I have already urged that borrowers should apply for films as much in advance as possible. But time is again lost, if borrowers do not state quite clearly the type of projector being used; 16 mm. is obviously not enough; we must know whether it is sound or silent. We must also know the exact date on which the films are to be shown (or alternative dates) and it helps us in selecting films if we know the audience for whom, or the purpose for which the films are required. Please do not telephone to make bookings, except in the most urgent circumstances; it is most unlikely that at such short notice the Library will be able to give you much help. And, finally, when you return films promptly tie them up so that they do not come adrift in the post. There is an empty box on my desk as I write this and somewhere between here and Birmingham there is a film which ought to go out tomorrow.

News from the Societies

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE

The Governors have submitted to the Board of Education a *Memorandum on Post-War Developments in Visual Aids*. The scheme suggests a ten year period of intensive distribution of apparatus and establishment of regional centres. These in their turn are to be linked by a central organisation whose functions will develop those of the existing British Film Institute.

The Governors are glad to be able to note that the number of members of the Institute continues to increase each month. During March, no fewer than 62 regular weekly 16 mm. programmes were got together and sent out to service units, Borstals, Approved Schools and other educational establishments. To these can be added a number of isolated shows the requests for which came mainly from Army sources.

The various viewing committees continue their thankless but valuable tasks of viewing and appraising all known films of an educational nature.

A new edition of the useful little pamphlet "Using School Projectors" has been published. It can be obtained from the Institute at 4 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1., price 1s.

THE NATIONAL FILM LIBRARY

Film and Reality, Cavalcanti's epic work for the National Film Library was completed early in February. It has received uniformly good reviews from the Press and has delighted those film society and other audiences who have had the good fortune to have seen it.

Four new early Chaplins have been added to the Loan Section. These are the 1914 *Tango Tangle* in which Chaplin acts without his moustache; the 1915 *The New Janitor* which seems to have been planned as a straight melodrama which is only prevented from being serious by Chaplin's assiduous clowning; the 1916 *Dough and Dynamite*, a riot of violent slapstick and one of Chaplin's most popular early comedies; and lastly the 1916 *His Trysting Place* in which also appear Mabel Normand, Mack Swain and Phyllis Allen in typical characterisations.

The 24 specially constructed new vaults in which more of the Library's films are to be permanently housed are nearly completed. Allowing for a drying-out period they should be ready in the early summer, by which time it is reckoned that the collection will have overflowed its present

bounds. The importance of the collection can be gauged by the fact that its minimum replacement value is now £11,500 and this takes no account of the priceless unique copies which it possesses of pre-sound films.

Twentieth Century Fox have presented for preservation copies of *Dark Rapture*, *Grapes of Wrath*, *Brigham Young*, *Drums along the Mohawk*, *Swanee River* and *The Great Profile*, all of which have been chosen for preservation by the Library's selection committee for some outstanding reason. The British Council has presented a further 30 reels of its weekly synthesis of all the news reels entitled *British News* as well as two shorts, *English Inn* and *Song of the Clyde*. By purchase the Committee has acquired *Girl in the Taxi* (U.S.A., 1922); *Long Pants* (U.S.A., 1926), directed by Frank Capra; *The Love Expert* (U.S.A., 1920), with Constance Talmadge; *Loyalty* (France, 1925); *Midnight Taxi* (U.S.A., 1928); *The New York Idea* (U.S.A., 1920); *Trail of the Law* (U.S.A., 1924), with Norma Shearer.

THE EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN

There seems to be a sufficient demand for further course for Training Colleges in the summer if conditions permit. The next issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND* will contain news of any further developments in this direction.

Two interesting developments have been a course on "film appreciation" organised by the Nuneaton authority—an example which it is to be hoped will be followed elsewhere—and lectures on the same subject to the pupils of several secondary schools.

The campaign comes to an end on April 30th, after which date this valuable contact work by the Institute will have to lapse unless the R.A.F. is prepared to release Mr. Gillett for a further period in order to continue this important work.

SCOTTISH FILM COUNCIL

The Ninth Scottish Amateur Film Festival was held in the Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow, on Sunday, March 8th.

The adjudication was by public ballot, voting slips being issued to each member of the audience. At the afternoon session the popular choice was *The Day Thou Gavest* by Montagu Pictures, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and second and third places were taken by *Copenhagen* and *Burmese Highway*, both produced by Matthew Nathan, London. At the evening session the winning film

was *Fourth in Hand* by the Meteor Film Society, Glasgow; second, *Two Hours to Wait*, by Joseph Bowyer, Leek; third, *An Apple a Day*, by Frank Marshall, Glasgow.

Large and enthusiastic audiences totalling 1,200 were present at both sessions.

MANCHESTER & DISTRICT FILM INSTITUTE SOCIETY

The Society continues its successful war-time policy of joint film shows with the Manchester and Salford Film Society.

The most exciting event of the season for us was a visit from Cavalcanti on March 22nd, and a showing of *Film and Reality*, followed by a discussion, the chairman being the Professor of Education at Manchester University.

The Society has just completed a year's work in presenting educational film shows to A.A. and Searchlight units in the area through the Regional Committee for Adult Education in H.M. Forces.

FILM COUNCIL OF THE SOUTH-WEST

The Area Film Library at Dartington has made good its loss in personnel and continues to extend its service to the region.

At the last Council meeting, the Secretary appealed for a sum of £100 to be devoted to the purchase of films, particularly silent films. Of this, £90 has already been raised, thanks to increasing support from Education Committees.

BELFAST FILM INSTITUTE SOCIETY

The last show of the season was in March, when *La Femme du Boulanger* was shown. With this the season should normally end, but there is a possibility that two or three more shows may be added, to make a season of record length. Publication of the monthly Review continues, probably until June.

BOY SCOUTS

During the last few months Scout films have been used extensively during local Youth Weeks and at Warship Week Exhibitions.

One film which is of particular interest at the moment is the *Cruise of the Orduna*. This is the film of a cruise made in the Baltic by the late Lord Baden-Powell in the company of Lady Baden-Powell and some hundreds of Rover Scouts and Girl Guides.

Sound versions (16 mm.) of the Scout films *Men of Tomorrow* and *Sea Scouts* have now been released by the M.O.I. and the British Council, both films being obtainable from the Central Film Library.

THE SCOTTISH FILM SOCIETIES

Each member of the Federation of Scottish Film Societies has managed to keep up an average of two programmes a month. A number of interesting programmes were arranged at Aberdeen and Dundee.

Edinburgh has continued its policy of specially built programmes. The American one included *A Man to Remember* as the feature and *The Old South* and *Forgotten Victory* as the supporting shorts. In another programme *Claudine* was teamed up with Rotha's *All those in Favour*, *Spring Offensive*, *Shadow in the Stream*, and others. In the Russian programme was included *Shors*, *Russian Salad* and other shorts.

Ayrshire has mainly concentrated on revivals of great films of the past.

YOUTH HOSTELS ASSOCIATION

The Y.H.A. films *Youth Hails Adventure* and *The Magic Shilling* are as much in demand as ever. Copies are being shown at schools, colleges and at a great many of the new Youth Centres which are being established up and down the country. A new short 25 minutes silent 16 mm. film will shortly be available.

GIRL GUIDES

The Ranger Branch of the Girl Guides Association has recently drawn up a special syllabus of Pre-Service Training, particularly suitable for the girls of 16 to 18 now registering. This training will prepare them for any form of National Service they decide to take up, making them fit, disciplined and ready for emergencies.

In order to be able to demonstrate to Education Authorities and the girls themselves the excellence and practical nature of this training, arrangements are now in hand for a film to be made of it.

A QUERY

The Scottish Film Council and the Scottish Educational Film Association have recently set up an Advisory Committee to investigate the place and function of the sound film in education, with special reference to the use of the sub-standard educational film in schools. In order that the investigation may be as complete and as up-to-date as possible, the Committee would be glad to know of any recent reports or experiments made on this subject, especially in relation to the comparative merits of sound and silent films for educational purposes. The Committee would be grateful if any readers who can give such information would kindly communicate with the undersigned

James McNaught.

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